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It is our responsibility to ensure that henceforth, no future generation of Sri Lankans, will have to experience the anguish that we underwent during the last three decades, said President Mahinda Rajapaksa addressing the diplomatic community at the Presidential Secretariat today (10 May).

The period of inquiry of the Commission covers from the commencement of the Ceasefire Agreement of February 2002 to its manifest breakdown that then finally led to the termination of the conflict situation in May 2009. The Commission will comprise persons of eminence, representing the multi-ethnic and multi-cultural nature of Sri Lankan society. I am confident that the Commissioners will discharge their responsibilities with a deep commitment to protect the dignity and independence of both this country and the Commission, the President added.

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Referring to the need for presenting an accurate view of the country abroad, President Rajapaksa said; 'very often some groups present various material to you. There are wide differences between the views of these sections and the vast majority of this country. Therefore,

in your reports to your Capitals about our country it would be most useful to exchange views with the Ministry of External Affairs and the Government'.

Following is the text of the President's address;

ADDRESS TO THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS

BY H.E. MAHINDA RAJAPAKSA, PRESIDENT OF SRI LANKA

May 10, 2010 – Presidential Secretariat, Colombo

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for your presence this afternoon which I value very much. Let me at the outset also thank you for the messages of felicitation sent on behalf of your countries and on your own behalf on the electoral successes of my Party and myself.

I am aware that some of you have served a long period in Sri Lanka. When I met you earlier, the terrorists were in control of fifteen thousand sq km of the land extent and two-thirds of the coastal belt of our country.

The policies of my Government on democracy and human freedom have remained unchanged from then. I launched the operations against the threat posed at the time by LTTE terrorism to all communities, because there was no other way to establish democracy in this country.

You would recall that several previous attempts were made to have negotiations for peace with the LTTE.

On my own initiative, one of my first statements after assuming the office of President was to publicly confirm my readiness to meet with the leader of the LTTE. I sent senior delegates for negotiations at both Geneva and Oslo with great expectations. But those attempts proved to be fruitless.

However, I state with great satisfaction that while battling the most ruthless and savage terrorist organization in the world, we have acted in a manner to fully protect the democratic rights of the people.

We held Provincial Council Elections in the East in May 2008, no sooner than the LTTE were cleared from that area. While the battle against terrorists was on, we held Elections in all Provinces and strengthened the democratic institutions of the country.

The recent Presidential and Parliamentary Elections enabled the electorate in the North to exercise their franchise for the first time after almost 28 years, without the menace of terrorism. Similarly, the General Election in the North and East demonstrate that the people in those areas are showing signs that they are seeking to free themselves of narrow political aims and consider deeply about their future. The General Election has shown that they are moving away in large

measure from political parties representing single communities or groups, and towards mainstream political parties. Of the 267,000 rendered internally displaced when the conflict situation ended due to their having been used as human shields by the LTTE, almost 70% have now been able to leave the transit welfare villages.

Excellencies, Friends,

It is in continuation of this same policy that action has been taken to relax several important Emergency Regulations when the matter came up for discussion in our Parliament on the 4th and 5th of this month. The amendments to these Regulations were done with great caution. It is interesting to state that in the recent debate on the Emergency a young Member of Parliament that it was older than himself.

There are frequent reports of the recovery of considerable weaponry secreted by the LTTE in many parts of the country. You are aware that the residues of the LTTE conduct vicious propaganda intended to generate funds for de-stabilizing Sri Lanka. A very visible manifestation of these efforts is the elections being held in many countries for a so-called Transnational Eelam Government.

You must be aware of the destructive aims faced by us. We, for our part, have been pointing out to the concerned authorities the sinister nature of these attempts.

No doubt all of you are aware that many countries of the world are faced with immense difficulties due to the threat of terrorism. Public life in the capitals of some countries faces immense threats from this. I need not reiterate that in some countries hundreds and thousands have been displaced due to this situation. Therefore, we pay special attention to our national security.

Very often some groups present various material to you. There are wide differences between the views of these sections and the vast majority of this country. Therefore, in your reports to your Capitals about our country it would be most useful to exchange views with the Ministry of External Affairs and the Government.

You should also be especially aware of the history as well as culture and lifestyles of Sri Lanka that is an Asian country. Perhaps the manner in which we view a particular situation may be different to the view of Western or European, Eastern or African states. It is necessary for us to work in accordance of our cultural values. Our history and traditions can guide the world on friendly co-existence among people. Similarly, Sri Lanka is a nation which can guide the world on religious amity. Hence, we have a deep understanding about human rights and friendship among nations.

Similarly, my Government has also been mindful of the need to heal the wounds caused to national amity by the conflict situation.

It is our intention to shortly appoint a Commission on Post- Conflict Study and Reconciliation. The preliminary work in this regard is now being concluded.

It is our responsibility to ensure that henceforth, no future generation of Sri Lankans, will have to experience the anguish that we underwent during the last three decades.

The period of inquiry of the Commission covers from the commencement of the Ceasefire Agreement of February 2002 to its manifest breakdown that then finally led to the termination of the conflict situation in May 2009. The Commission will comprise persons of eminence, representing the multi-ethnic and multi-cultural nature of Sri Lankan society. I am confident that the Commissioners will discharge their responsibilities with a deep commitment to protect the dignity and independence of both this country and the Commission.

My Government is determined to hold Provincial Council Elections in the North, at the earliest appropriate time. We believe that both through the recently completed Parliamentary Election and the forthcoming Provincial Council Election, there will emerge a leadership sensitive to the specific needs of those areas and to the national aspirations for peace and progress. In the recent elections a majority of representatives from the Government were elected from those Provinces. We are continuing a wide ranging dialogue with them as well as those from other political parties.

Excellencies and Friends,

The return to normalcy of our country and its accompanying further entrenchment of democratic governance, adds to our strength to successfully engage with the world outside. The mandate I received at the Presidential and Parliamentary elections is to protect the freedom and peace won with much sacrifice. Similarly, I have also obtained a mandate to make Sri Lanka a dynamic hub of global activity.

From the time I assumed duties in 2005, much attention was paid to the development of the Sri Lankan economy. Priority was given to infrastructure development that sought to erase the unjustifiable disparities between the rural and urban sectors of society and the inequalities of income among the people that did not suit a democratic society. Similarly, considerable work was done in spheres such as education, health and skills development. We gave importance to both food and energy security. While all this was being achieved the per capita income of the country was increased from USD 1000 to USD 2000 in a short span of four years.

Through the future strategies for development it is planned to raise the per capita income to exceed USD 4000. The new Cabinet of Ministers will work as the institutional structure of the state to achieve these objectives. Plans are underway to increase Sri Lanka's investment to exceed 35% of national income and economic growth to exceed 8%. It is our determination to provide all citizens a high level of education and health services and to build an environment friendly lifestyle in the country.

In this endeavour, a great responsibility lies with our development community which has stood with us under the most arduous circumstances. Similarly, I wish to state here that the international financial institutions have also contributed much to our development efforts. We value very much the manner in which the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank and bilateral donor countries have come forward to assist us in our development activities. We look

forward to necessary assistance from all countries towards this purpose.

It is my expectation that the international community and the donor groups would play a large role in assisting to expand our opportunities for development as a middle income country and to reach the status of a developed country within a democratic framework.

We will remain conscious that the creation of global prosperity and security is a shared responsibility. We have always felt that a rule based, equitable global order is the best guarantor for the progress of humanity. We will, therefore, continue our tradition of active engagement in all multilateral fora and especially in the United Nations.

Friends,

Global warming is inextricably tied up with the very survival of the human race. Environmental pollution has no national borders with pollution in one country affecting another. The reason for the rising global temperatures is the burning of fossil fuel. The advanced industrial countries of today have achieved their development through the burning of fossil fuel. Therefore, the responsibility of reducing global warming requires the intervention of these industrial countries. Sri Lanka as a country that causes minimal carbon emission in its development process, we are committed to participate in the reduction in global warming. Sri Lanka contributes to this most effectively under the Green Lanka programme.

Friends,

As you are aware, our foreign policy is always a non-aligned and independent. We have the closest relations with India, China, Japan as well as other neighbouring countries. You are aware that we maintain the closest relations with the countries of Asia, Africa, the West, the Middle East and Europe. Our relations with Europe go back more than 500 years. Our relations with Rome can be traced far back into history as our relations with India, China and the countries of the Middle East.

We will always deeply value the friendship of bilateral relations that brought benefit to us over the past four years and helped us to resolutely deal with the menace of terrorism.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Sri Lanka always wishes to engage in a spirit of trust. It is often said that trust begets trust. This is common to the good relations among countries too.

I wish you all a prosperous future.

